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THE PARK SYSTEMS OF AMERICAN CITIES

BY ANDREW WRIGHT CRAWFORD

I.—BUFFALO

THE movement toward "The City Beautiful," toward the reasonable realization of the hopes of men who were once thought idealists, is broad in its scope. The great aggregation of homes and business houses and manufacturing plants that we associate with the thought of "a metropolis" has no monopoly of the agitation. Smaller cities, cities "of the third class," boroughs, villages, are sharing in it; the good roads movement is but a manifestation of it; and there has lately been a clarion call for improvement in the architecture of our farmhouses. The need that is felt for the beautiful is not confined to one class nor to one section, nor is it bounded by any form of political division, be it local, state, or national.

One marked feature of this movement is the desire to preserve the works of nature where they are worth preserving, and to restore some semblance of natural beauty where all trace of it is gone. The obvious short-cut to the attainment of these objects is to preserve places of unusual natural attraction, such as public parks, and to replace disease-breeding hovels of squalid ugliness by squares or playgrounds.

The last decade has seen much accomplished in actual results, and much more in the awakening of the public to an appreciation of the utilitarian as well as esthetic advantages that are to be gained. But the movement did not secure spontaneously the headway

sufficient to achieve what has actually been done. During the entire century it was slowly gathering force. In Philadelphia, the first third of the nineteenth century saw the acquisition of the Fairmount Waterworks, the nucleus of Fairmount Park. The Park grew slowly until, by the Act of 1868, the appointment of the Board of Fairmount Park Commissioners was authorized; and the great area of the Park was soon secured, giving Philadelphia a leadership that was held for twenty years and lost only as a result of the impetus given the movement throughout the country in 1893.

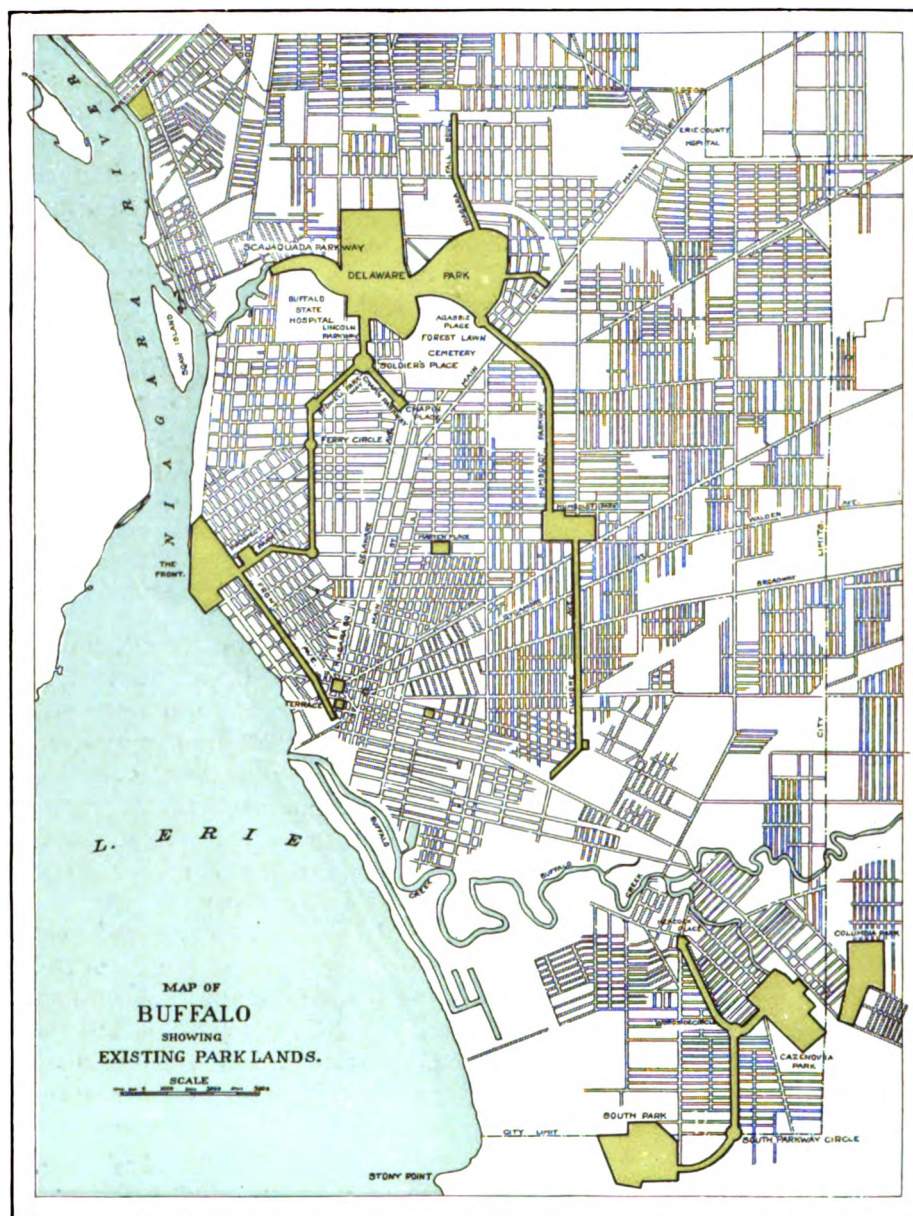
In 1856 New York began the acquisition of Central Park, and finished it in 1867. The Buffalo Park Commission was appointed in 1870. Boston secured Franklin Park in the seventies. Other cities were obtaining parks in a desultory sort of way. Individuals were urging action and devising plans. But no system was officially adopted, no well-thought-out scheme of civic adornment. For two-thirds of a century the City of Washington tried to forget as much as possible of its original plan and grew as the surveyors found easiest. Then, in the seventies, came

Boss Shepard, who laid out the northern and northwestern section so that it is now the most beautiful quarter of any city in this country,—but Boss Shepard was put out of the town because thereof. Elsewhere spasmodic efforts were made but there was no continuous



A VIEW ON DELAWARE AVENUE

The Principal Residential Street of Buffalo and a Parkway in all but name



AN OUTLINE MAP OF BUFFALO
Specially prepared in order to show the existing Park Areas

demand for the acquisition of comprehensive systems.

In the early eighties an agitation began in London for the establishment of small open spaces. The movement was reflected in this country by the formation of associations with the same object in view. The cost of acquiring small parks in the central portions of cities quickly caused a vivid realization of the error of former generations in not securing such spaces before they were built upon. When New York had to pay for three small parks, covering barely nine acres, as much as it paid for Central Park, it needed no further argument to show the folly of repeating the mistake.

When suburban recreation grounds were being acquired, it was foreseen that it would be comparatively easy to join them by wide, tree-lined avenues. It is perhaps hard to determine how much this suggestion was due to the example of European cities in so far as the replacing of their surrounding walls by boulevards is concerned. At any rate, about 1893 the initiative was taken toward the acquisition of comprehensive systems in this country.

In that year, under the leadership of Charles Eliot, the park system of Boston was begun. In joining as a complete whole the parks that existed in 1893 and combining with them larger outlying reservations joined by connecting parkways, it has had and is still having a very great effect throughout the country. But other cities were little behind Boston. Indeed, Kansas City began a remarkable development in the same year, 1893, and the Essex County Park System of New Jersey, the greatest county system in the country, was begun only a year or two later. This county system is likewise hav-



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THE BUFFALO SAVINGS BANK

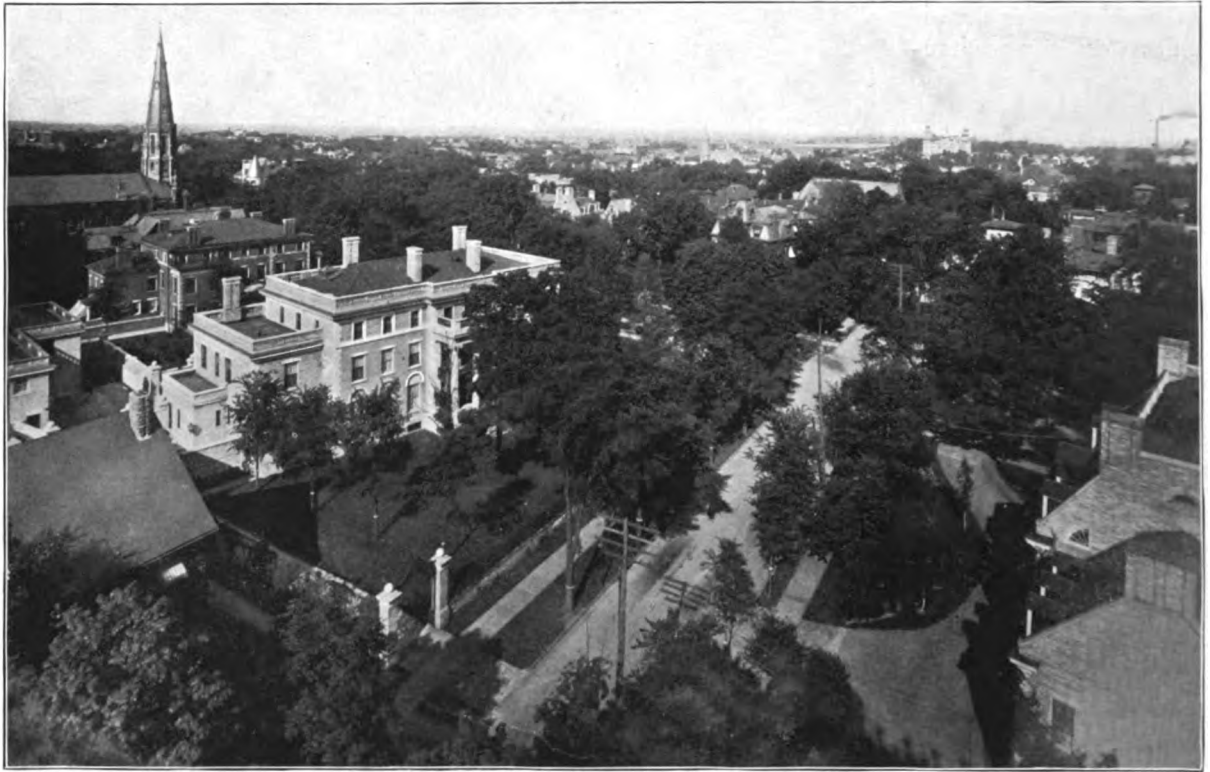
Illustrating the effective use of building sites at angular intersections of streets

ing effect, and the Park Commission of the neighboring Hudson County is, at this writing, preparing its first annual report. Some cities have systems partly acquired, others are just beginning. The movement is international and the Canadian Government has recently received the report of an expert on the improvement of its capital, Ottawa, through the acquisition of a park system. The cities of the Pacific slope have had plans prepared. North, south, east and west the compelling desire is spreading. Comparatively little notice has been taken of this universality of the movement and yet it is distinctly one of the most hopeful characteristics of the present day. It has therefore been suggested that a series of short papers be published, dealing with the subject more in detail.

The park system of Buffalo is one of the most interesting so far constructed. It offers variety. It has accepted conditions as it found them. The first or inner ring of parks and parkways has nearly been completed.

The opportunity was exceptional. The great curse of American cities is the regularity of their city plans. Built on the rectangular gridiron system, of which the unfortunate plan of William Penn for Philadel-

The Park Systems of American Cities



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF A TYPICAL SECTION OF BUFFALO

Showing the unusually large proportion of verdure

phia was the exemplar, many cities and towns of this country compel their inhabitants to run their latitude and longitude separately instead of taking a direct course. It will be noticed that this is not true of Buffalo. From Niagara Square, which marks the center of the city, the streets branch out in several directions, fan-shaped, the handle of the fan on the Square. This means that the citizens may reach almost any outlying section in the shortest time possible. For a city of the present size of Buffalo the plan thus simply conceived is admirable. But the wisdom of the founders of the city has not been handed down or the present engineers would have located other *foci* for radiating streets within two miles, at most, of this central focus of Niagara Square. They would have plotted a diagonal avenue running southeastward from a point on the northern river shore, perhaps opposite the southern end of Squaw Island, to Ferry Street Circle, thence to Masten Place, and on to the limits of the city, with a Circle at its intersection with Fillmore Avenue. Similarly from a point on the lake shore about a

mile and a half south of Niagara Square there should be a direct route across the southern, southeastern and eastern sections of the city, perhaps crossing Fillmore Avenue at the same Circle. Nevertheless, with the business center where it is and, as a result, with the main traffic flowing directly to and from Niagara Square, the plan of Buffalo, taken exactly as it is, is surpassed by only one city in this country and that the National Capital.

This radiating plan of Buffalo has meant a great deal to its architects. It has given them angles of all kinds upon which to erect their buildings. It is curious that the opponents of advance who are called conservatives and who of course are believers in the gridiron system, have pitched on these irregular corners as an objection to diagonal avenues, when as a matter of fact they are one of their chief advantages. The photograph here reproduced of a bank in Buffalo gives some idea of the possibilities of such irregular corners even when the surroundings are unattractive buildings with their sky lines shattered, with advertisements

shouting to the heavens, and with overhead wires doing their best to interfere with the attractiveness of the main building.

In yet another characteristic is Buffalo fortunate. Many of its houses, particularly in the residential section, are set back considerably from the street with open spaces between them. The result is that even though some of the houses are not architecturally attractive the total effect of the residential section of Buffalo is distinctly pleasing. Grass and trees and shrubbery must ever be essential features of the City Beautiful. Modern sky-scrapers have made everyone familiar with the appearance of the tops of city houses. As one looks out of the window one sees a dreary mass of heavy, brick smoke-stacks piled on slate or tin roofs and occasional glimpses of the top stories of uninteresting buildings with scarcely a bit of verdure to relieve the monotony of the scene. It is not so throughout Buffalo. The view which is here reproduced shows the principal residential section along Delaware Avenue. The effect of houses set back from tree-lined streets can be secured on one or two streets at least in most cities, but in scarcely any can a scene comparable with this one be found. Even the overhead wires are forgotten in the pleasure given by the unusual view.

The park system of Buffalo begins a few yards southwest of Niagara Square with the Terrace, whence Front Avenue leads to "The Front," a park forty-eight acres in extent that fronts on the Niagara River; thence Porter Avenue leads past Prospect Place to a circular park five hundred feet in diameter at its intersection with Richmond Avenue. These Circles, of which there are several in the Buffalo system, are as delightful features there as they are in Washington. When a number of streets intersect at the same focus there results a number of triangular points. By taking the focus and laying out a circular park around it, these points are truncated, thus giving greater variety to the scene and,—the chief advantage—giving each street that comes to the focus

something to end its vista. The eye is not led past continuous houses to nothing, as in so many cities. Circular parks so situated offer effective locations for monuments, but the monument should be much finer than the majority of public monuments in this country in order to deserve location at such *foci*.

From this Circle Richmond Avenue leads to Ferry Street Circle and thence to Bidwell Place. Bidwell Place and Chapin Place again introduce variety. While their outline is square, they are set at angles of forty-five degrees to the streets that form the approaches to them so that the streets enter at their corners. The squares thus situated likewise end the vistas of the streets that enter them. From Bidwell Place the Bidwell Parkway, two hundred feet in width, runs for a half mile to Soldiers' Circle, the largest circular park of Buffalo, seven hundred feet in diameter. Soldiers' Circle can be reached more directly from Niagara Square by following Delaware Avenue (the principal residential street of Buffalo and a parkway in all but name) directly to Chapin Place, already spoken of, whence the Chapin Parkway runs for half a mile to Soldiers' Circle. This circle marks the entrance to the Lincoln Parkway, two hundred feet in width, which forms the approach to Delaware Park, the largest park of the City, covering 362 acres.

On each side of Delaware Park, southeast and southwest of it, are open spaces which



A VIEW IN FOREST LAWN CEMETERY
Illustrating the "natural" treatment of a stream

have much of the character of parks about them. One is occupied by the Buffalo State Hospital and the other by the Forest Lawn Cemetery. There is no reason why our cemeteries should not be as beautiful as the cemeteries abroad. The cemetery of Weimar, for example, the home of Goethe, is a beautiful mass of color. We have yet to realize how much can be done when cemeteries are not made mere marble quarries. In the Forest Lawn Cemetery the landscape architects of many parks will find much to learn. A stream is left with its natural loam banks and the path is made to follow it without interfering with it. When you come to great rivers in cities it is necessary to wall them, as has been done with the Seine in Paris and with the rivers in many other European cities, but the smaller streams if properly treated can be left much as nature arranged them.

Leading from the northeastern corner of Delaware Park, the Niagara Falls Parkway has been projected a short distance. Eastwardly the Scajaquada Parkway, three hundred feet wide, follows a creek of that name for a half mile. From Agassiz Circle, the southeastern corner of Delaware Park, the Humboldt Parkway runs for a mile and three-quarters to Humboldt Park. A main feature of the latter is a wading pond, which is very popular with small children in summer. From Humboldt Park, Fillmore Avenue continues the system southwardly to Seneca Street. The southeastern parks, Cazenovia Park, South Park, Heacock Place and two Circles, covering about two hun-

dred and seventy acres, are also connected into a system by the South Side Parkway. It will be observed that the connection between the southern end of the main portion of the system at the end of Fillmore Avenue and the northeastern end of the southern parkways has yet to be worked out. The avenues mentioned, with the exception of Delaware Avenue, are under the charge of the Park Commission, as well as the parks and parkways.

One feature of the park system of Buffalo is distinctly obnoxious, namely, the allowing of buildings in their parks. Delaware Park is a country park, but in one section so many public buildings have been erected that, attractive though they are, they practically eliminate the rural feature of the park in their vicinity. This danger, that public parks may be appropriated for buildings of one kind and another, is one that will have to be faced constantly in the future throughout the country.

In addition to the parks spoken of, Buffalo has twenty-seven small triangles, the green spots that add so much to the beauty of any city. Its total park area is 1049 acres. Doubtless the future will see yet larger areas in the suburban sections secured for the use of the people and connected by parkways with the open spaces already existing, and small children's playgrounds opened in the heart of the city. Buffalo's large percentage of tree-lined streets, with houses set back, its fairly admirable city plan and its park system gives it a character that is much to be envied by many of its sister cities.

